

KENT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Animal Shelter

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TO: Senate Agricultural Committee Members:

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Mike Green

Wayne Schmidt

Darwin Booher

Bert Johnson

FROM: Eric Pessell, Director,
Environmental Health Division

DATE: May 24, 2016

RE: Written Testimony Opposing SB 0727

Good Morning, my name is Eric Pessell and I am currently the Environmental Health Director for the Kent County Health Department. I have been working in Public Health for 22 years, the past 16 as a Director.

My responsibility covers a wide range of regulatory oversight for the purpose of protecting the public's health, including wastewater, drinking water, food safety, recreational programs, and most importantly for this testimony, the animal shelter (animal control).

My reason for opposing SB727 is simple. Current law does not allow dogs that are pets to be in a food service establishment. This bill, if enacted, would lift that restriction and allow dogs to be in the outdoor areas of the food service establishment within an enclosed area. Why would we want this? What is the reward versus risk? What is the benefit to society by allowing dogs in food service establishments that outweighs the increased risk for the health and safety of the public? My answer is none.

Currently, the risk of a dog bite in a restaurant is **very low**, why change that? Some will say it is because the dog is on a leash and under the supervision of their owner and the risk has been mitigated.

I disagree, there are three normal dog behavioral concerns that I have that may not be controlled by their owner: food aggression, dog-to-dog aggression, and the dog's protective nature of the owner. The average dog owner does not have the knowledge or skill to train dogs with these types of behaviors. All three of these behaviors can lead to a bite/attack, and many of the bite cases we investigate in animal control are due to one of these three behaviors. Imagine a child walking by a dog, and the child drops food they are carrying near the dog. An otherwise normal dog, but food aggression will put that child in danger of being bitten/attacked regardless of whether the dog is on a leash or not.

I do not see a way that we can deregulate the risks by allowing dogs in outside enclosed areas within a food service establishment. The only way to eliminate the risk is to continue with the law as it is currently written and not allowing dogs in food service establishments.

Thank you for your time.